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ON THE SCIENCE OF THE FINE ARTS.

BEING THE FOURTEENTH AND LAST LECTURE OF F. W. J. SCHELLING ON "THE METHOD OF UNIVERSITY STUDIES." TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY MRS. ELLA S. MORGAN.

The science of art may, in the first place, mean the historical construction of art. In this sense its external condition requires an actual consideration of the existing monuments of art. Since this is possible as regards the art of poetry, this art is explicitly included among the subjects of academic study as the science of philology. Nevertheless, philology, in the sense we have defined it, is scarcely taught at universities—which is not a matter of surprise, since it is no less an art than poetry itself, and the philologist, like the artist, is born, not made.

Still less is the idea of an historical construction of the plastic arts to be sought at universities; for they lack the means of study by actual observation; even where, as a matter of pride, lectures are attempted, with the aid of a complete library, they are necessarily confined to presenting a knowledge of the history of art.

Universities are not schools of art. Still less can they teach the science of art with a view to practical or technical ends.

There remains, therefore, the purely speculative view, which is concerned with the intellectual conception of art, and not with its empirical development. But this presupposes a philosophical construction of art, in opposition to which serious doubts arise from the side of philosophy as well as of art.

The philosopher whose intellectual intuition should be directed to the truth that is open only to the mind, and remains hidden to the perception of the senses—what has he to do with the science of art, whose sole object is the creation of a beautiful appearance, which either deceives with illusive images of truth, or is wholly directed to the senses? Most people, indeed, think of art as a delight for the senses, as a recreation for the mind fatigued by other and more serious occupation, or else as an agreeable excitement, whose only advantage is the refined medium which it employs. To the philosopher this latter quality of art, aside from the fact that he must regard it as the effect of the sensuous impulse, is the stamp of its perishable nature, and of its injurious tendencies. If

this is the idea of art, philosophy must utterly condemn it in order to protest against the sensuous tendency to which art seems to incline.

I speak of art in a more sacred sense, art which, in the words of the ancients, is an instrument of the gods, the revealer of divine mysteries, the discoverer of ideas, of that beauty whose holy light illumines only pure souls, and whose form is as invisible to the sensuous eye as the form of truth itself. The philosopher can have nothing to do with what is called art in the ordinary sense of the word. Art to him is a reflection of the divine, a necessary and immediate image of the absolute, and only as this can be shown and proved has it any reality to the philosopher.

“But did not Plato himself condemn imitative art in his ‘Republic,’ banish the poets as not only useless but dangerous members of the ideal state; can there be more convincing authority for the antagonism of art and philosophy than this judgment of the greatest of philosophers?”

It is essential for us to recognize from what particular point of view Plato utters his condemnation of the poets, for he, more than other philosophers, observed the importance of the point of view taken, and without this distinction it would be impossible, especially in regard to this point, to comprehend his complexly related theories, or to harmonize the contradicting statements found in his works on this same subject. We must first consider that the higher philosophy, and Plato’s in particular, was the peculiar antithesis involved in Greek civilization, not merely as regards the sensuous conceptions of religion, but also as regards the objective and real forms of the state. Is it not possible that, in an ideal and at the same time unrealized state like Plato’s “Republic,” there could be no other conception of poetry, and that the limits he assigns to poetry may be necessary from its very nature? The answer to this question would lead us too far. This opposition between all public forms and philosophy itself must necessarily produce such an opposition between the latter and the former. Plato is neither the first nor the only example. From Pythagoras and still earlier, down to Plato, philosophy knows itself to be an exotic on Greek soil, a feeling which is indicated in the universal instinct which led those who were initiated into higher doctrines, either by the wisdom of earlier philoso-

phers or by the mysteries, back to the Orient, the motherland of ideas.

But, apart from this merely historical, not philosophical, antithesis, what is Plato's rejection of the art of poetry, especially when compared with his praise of "enthusiastic poetry" in other works; what is it but the natural polemic against poetic realism, a prophecy of the general intellectual tendency of later times and of poetry in particular? And such a judgment could least of all apply to Christian poetry, which as a whole reflects the character of the eternal as unmistakably as the poetry of the old world reflected the finite. The fact that we are able to determine the limits of the latter more exactly than could Plato, who did not know the contrast between the ancient and modern world, the fact that we can rise to a more comprehensive idea and construction of poetry than he, and that what he considered the degradation of the poetry of his time, we see as its beautiful limitation. This advantage we owe to a riper experience, and it enables us to see fulfilled what Plato prophesied and missed. The Christian religion, and with it the whole intellectual tendency, which in classic poetry could find neither complete satisfaction nor the means to express it, has created its own poetry and art in which it finds itself reflected. Hence we see that the objective theory of art, consequently of classic art itself, is limited by these conditions.

Hence we see that the construction of art is a worthy subject of the philosopher, but especially of the Christian philosopher, whose particular business it should be to measure its universal content, and demonstrate its necessity.

But, to look at the other side of this subject, is the philosopher able to penetrate to the very essence of art, and represent it truly?

I hear one say: "Who dare hope to speak worthily of that sacred principle which moves the artist, that spiritual breath which vivifies his work, unless it be one who is himself warmed by the divine fire? Shall we attempt to subordinate to law that which is as incomprehensible in its origin as it is wonderful in its influence? Can we determine and bring under dominion of law that which in its very nature recognizes no law but itself? Are not ideas as powerless to comprehend genius as law is to create it? Who dares to rise in thought above that which is the freest,

the most absolute thing in the whole universe ; who dares to strain his sight to the utmost limits of vision, there to find only new limits?"

These may be the words of an enthusiast, who has only seen art in its effects, but who knows not what it is in truth, nor what the domain of philosophy is in the universe. For, even if we concede that art is not to be conceived as the expression of something higher than itself, it is still an immutable law of the universe that everything which is part of it has its type or antitype in other parts. So absolute is the form of the universal antithesis of the real and the ideal, that, at the limit between the infinite and the finite, there, where the antitheses of phenomena vanish in pure universality, the same relationship asserts itself, and returns in the final potency. This is the relation which exists between philosophy and art.

The latter, although absolute and complete identity of the real and ideal, is related to philosophy as the real to the ideal. In philosophy the last antithesis of knowing is resolved into pure identity, while at the same time it remains ideal in its relation to art. Thus at the highest point they both meet, and, by means of the absolute nature common to both, become type and antitype. For this reason philosophy penetrates scientifically into the essential nature of art, and it is even true that the philosopher sees more clearly into the *spirit* of art than the artist himself. As the ideal is a higher reflection of the real, so the philosopher necessarily has a higher ideal image of that which the artist possesses as real. From this it is evident that in philosophy art may become an object of knowing ; nay, more, it is clear that, except through and in philosophy, nothing absolute can be known of the nature of art.

The artist—since in him the same principle is objective which in the philosopher is subjectively reflected—stands to the latter, therefore, not as subjective or conscious, although it is not impossible that through a higher reflection he may become conscious ; but in the quality of artist he does not become so. As artist, he is impelled by this principle, consequently he does not possess it ; if he brings it to the state of ideal reflection, he elevates himself as artist to a higher power, but still his relation remains objective in so far as he remains an artist. That which is subjective in

him becomes objective, just as in the philosopher the objective becomes subjective. Hence philosophy, in spite of its essential identity with art, is always and necessarily science, that is, ideal, while art is always and necessarily art, that is, real.

How the philosopher is able to follow art even to its secret and primitive source, to the first workshops of its creation, is incomprehensible from the purely objective standpoint, and would be impossible in a philosophy which does not reach the same height in the ideal that art attains in the real. Those rules which genius can dispense with are those which are prescribed by the mechanical understanding. Genius is its own law; it rejects foreign authority, but acknowledges its own, for it is only genius in so far as it is the highest law. Philosophy recognizes the fact that genius is an absolute law unto itself, because it is itself not only self-governing, but aspires to the principle of all self-government. It has been seen in all ages that true artists are calm, simple, great, and necessary, like Nature herself. That enthusiasm which sees in the artist only genius untrammelled by rules, is a reflection of the negative side of genius. It is a second-hand enthusiasm, not of the kind which inspires the artist, and which in its god-like freedom is at the same time the purest and highest necessity.

But we may ask: If the philosopher is the ablest to demonstrate that which is incomprehensible in art, to recognize its absolute nature, will he be equally skillful in seizing that which is comprehensible, and which may be determined by rules? I mean, of course, the technical side of art. Will philosophy be able to descend to its technical execution, to the means, and the conditions of its existence as an art?

Philosophy, whose concern is with ideas alone in respect to the empirical side of art, must show forth only the universal laws of phenomena, and this only in the form of ideas, for the forms of art are the forms of things in and for themselves, as they are in the archetypes. So far, therefore, as they are universal, and can be seen independently in the universal, so far their presentation is a necessary part of the philosophy of art, but not in so far as these forms contain rules for the execution and practice of art. Therefore we say that the philosophy of art is a presentation of the absolute world in the form of art. It is only the theory of art which is immediately related to the particular (as opposed to

the universal), and has an end in view. It is the practical means by which any special work of art can be accomplished. The philosophy of art, on the contrary, is unconditioned, and has no end outside of itself. If, in answer to this, an appeal is made to the fact that the technical part of art is the means by which it reflects truth, it devolves on the philosopher to answer that this truth is itself only empirical. That which the philosopher sees in it, and which it is his duty to demonstrate, is truth of a higher kind, is identical with absolute beauty, the truth of ideas.

The condition of antagonism and conflict, as regards even the first notions of art, which is inevitable in the art-judgment of an age which is ambitious to realize by intellectual reflection the hidden sources of art, makes it doubly desirable that we should scientifically investigate the absolute view of art, as well as the forms through which it is expressed. For, so long as this is not done, both the criticism and the practical execution of art have no defense against vulgarity and commonplace, and are subject to narrow, one-sided, and capricious views.

The construction of art in each of its particular forms down to the concrete leads of itself to the determination of these forms as conditioned by each particular age, and, consequently, passes over into historical construction. And there is little doubt that such a history is entirely possible, including the whole history of art, since the duality of the universe, in the contrast between antique and modern art, has been most thoroughly demonstrated in this department, partly by means of poetry, partly by criticism. Since construction in general is the cancellation of antitheses, those which belong to art being the result of its dependence on each particular age, they must be like the age itself, temporary and conventional. But the scientific construction will consist in the demonstration of their common unity, out of which particular forms arose, and which, therefore, transcend and comprehend all particular forms.

Such a construction of art is, of course, not to be compared with anything which, up to this time, has existed under the name of æsthetics, theory of the fine arts and sciences, etc. In the general principles of the originator of the first designation there was at least an intimation of the true idea of the beautiful, of the primitive type of the beautiful, reflected in the concrete, phenomenal

world. It gradually became more and more definitely dependent on the ethical and practical view of the world. In the psychological theories, its phenomena were explained away as if they were ghost stories or some other superstition, until the appearance of Kant's formalism introduced a new and higher insight, in spite of the fact that it was burdened by many empty theories about art.

The germs of a true science of art, sown by great minds since the time of Kant, have not yet developed to the scientific whole of which they give promise. A philosophy of art is the necessary aim of the philosopher, who sees the true nature of art in his science as clearly as if he looked into a magic mirror. As a science, art is interesting to the philosopher in and for itself. Just as the philosophy of nature or the construction of the great products and phenomena of the world, or construction of a world complete and independent, or as nature itself is interesting and important. The enthusiastic investigator learns from them the true archetypes of forms which he finds confused and obscure in nature, and recognizes them in works of art as sensuous images which have their origin in nature.

The internal bond which unites art and religion, the impossibility, on the one hand, of any poetic world outside of religion and through religion, and the impossibility, on the other hand, of making religion really an objective phenomenon except by means of art—these considerations make a scientific knowledge of art a necessity in genuine religion.

And, finally, let me say that it is a disgrace for those who have a direct or indirect part in the government of the state to lack either a real love or a real knowledge of art. For nothing honors princes and those in authority more than to prize the arts, to admire their products, and to encourage their creation; and there is no sadder or more disgraceful sight than when those, who have the means to promote the highest perfection of art, spend their money to encourage bad taste, barbarity, and insinuating vulgarity. Even if it cannot be generally understood that art is a necessary and essential part of a state founded on ideas, we should at least heed the example of antiquity, whose festivals, eternal monuments, whose drama, and the acts of whose public life were all only the various branches of one universal, objective, and living work of art.